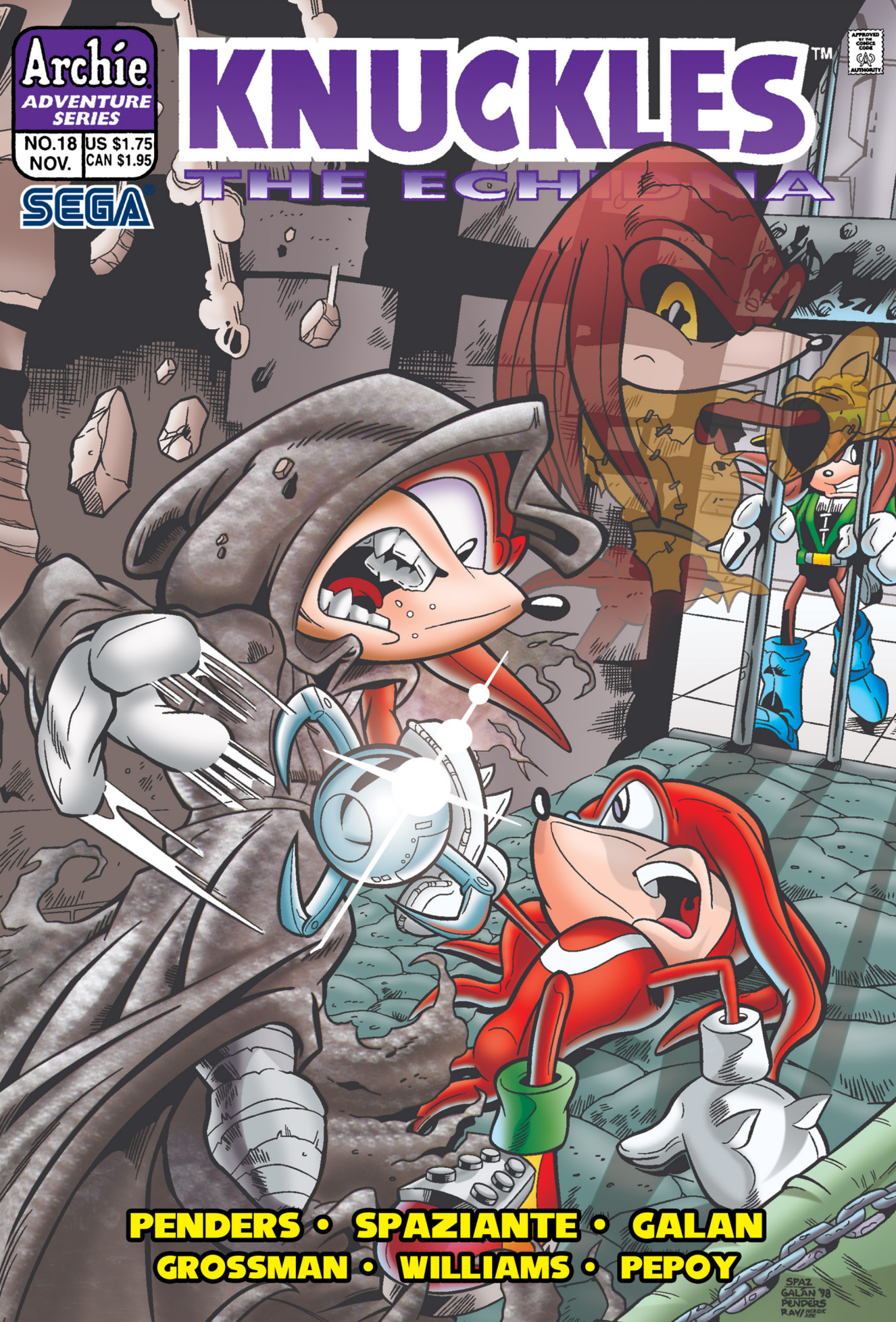
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BOOK EIGHTEEN

DEEP COVER

PART TWO OF TWO

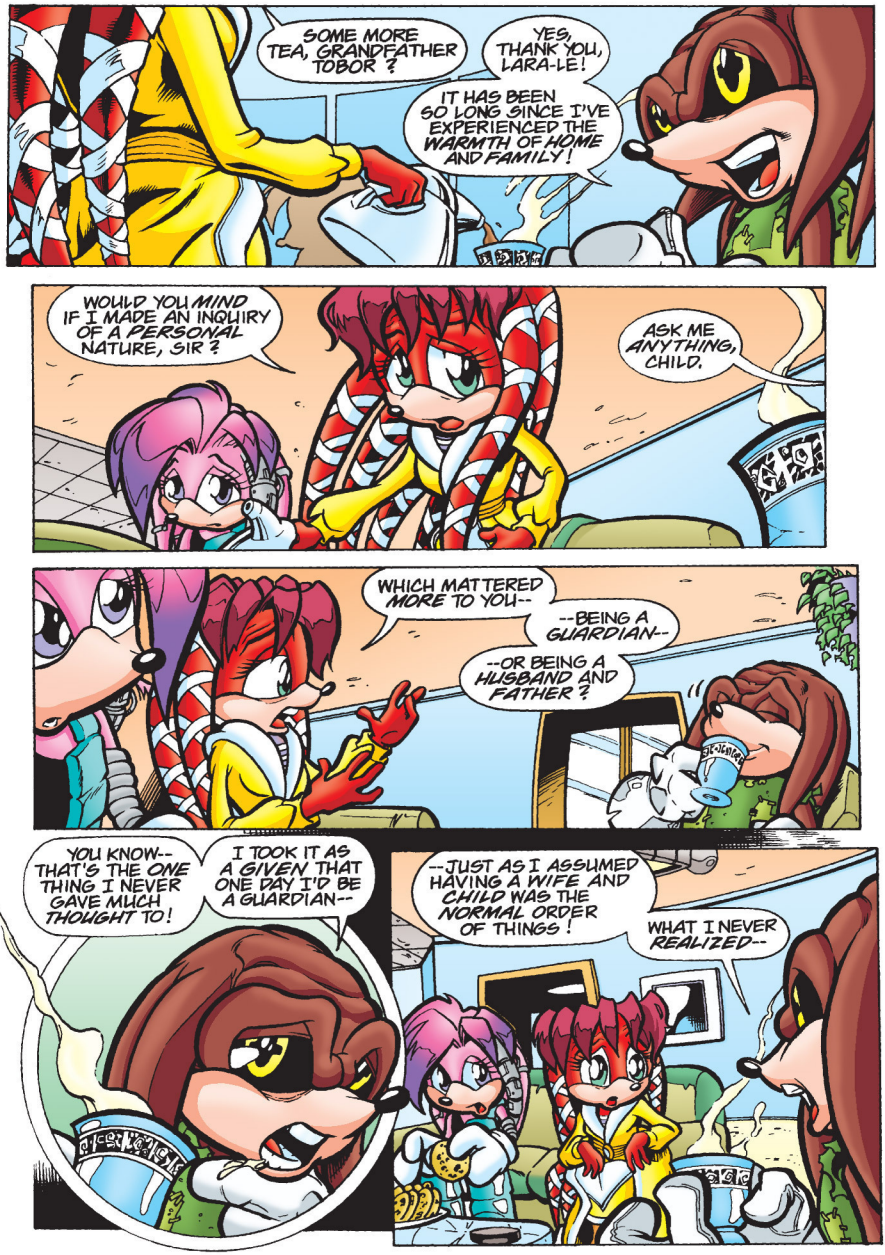
KEN PENDERS: WRITER MANNY GALAN: PENCILER ANDREW PEPOY: INKER
BARRY GROSSMAN: COLORIST VICKIE WILLIAMS: LETTERER
JUSTIN GABRIE: EDITOR
VICTOR GORELICK: MANAGING EDITOR RICHARD GOLDWATER: EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

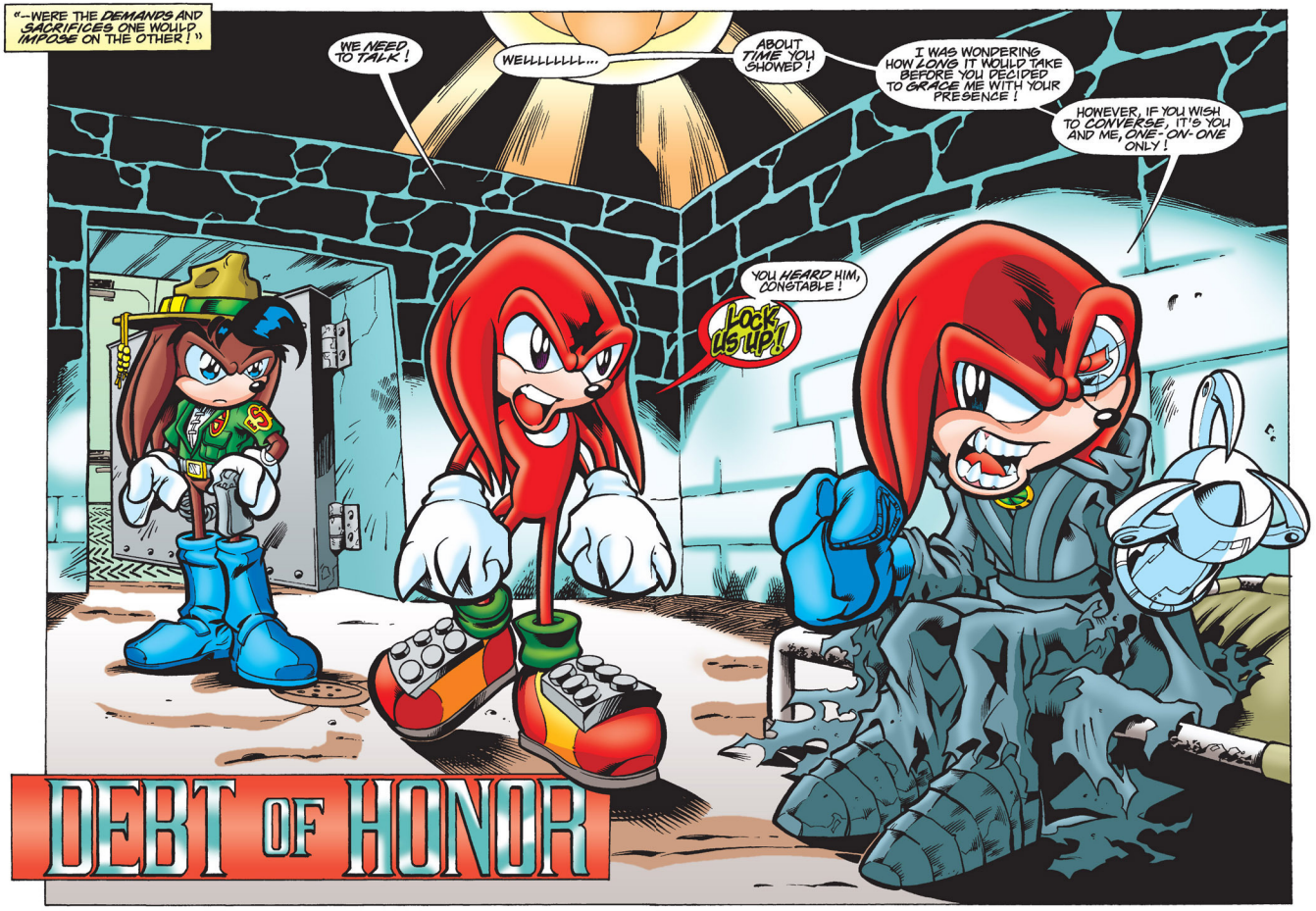
BORN TO THE MOST NOBLE OF ECHIDNA HOUSES, THE LATEST TO CONTINUE THE FAMILY HERITAGE AND RESPONSIBILITY AS **GUARDIAN OF THE FLOATING ISLAND**, DEFENDER OF ALL FROM THE FORCES OF EVIL FROM THE WORLD BEYOND AS WELL AS THOSE WHO WOULD THREATEN WITHIN, HE IS NONE OTHER THAN

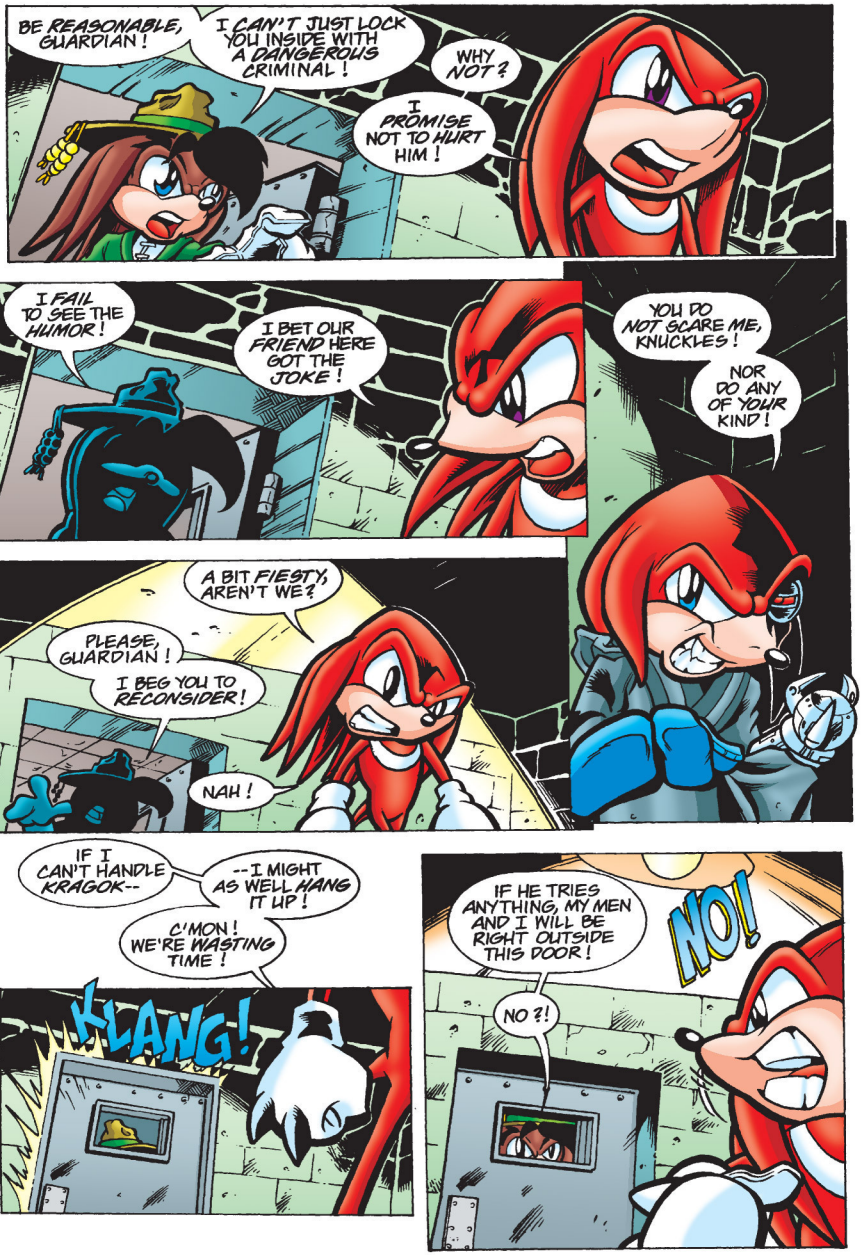
KNUCKLES THE ECHIDNA!

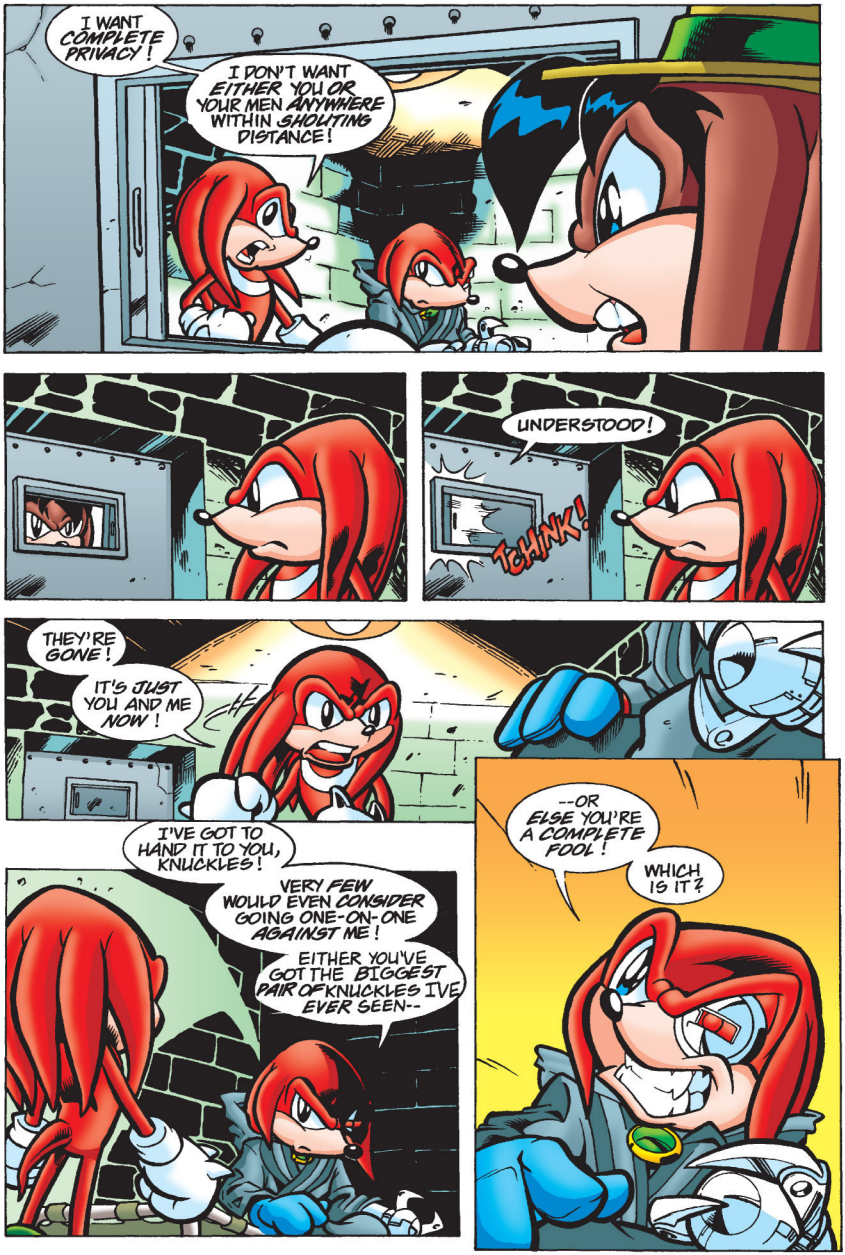
LAST ISSUE, KNUCKLES DISCOVERED THAT A WANDERING STRANGER **JULIE-SU** HAD ENCOUNTERED WAS IN FACT HIS **GRANDFATHER TOBOR**, WHO HAD BEEN THE VICTIM OF A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY. SO GREAT WAS HIS SHAME, HAVING LOST TO THE **DARK LEGION** IN THE FIRST CRISIS HE HAD EVER FACED, THAT TOBOR FOUND HIMSELF UNABLE TO RETURN HOME AND FACE HIS FAMILY.

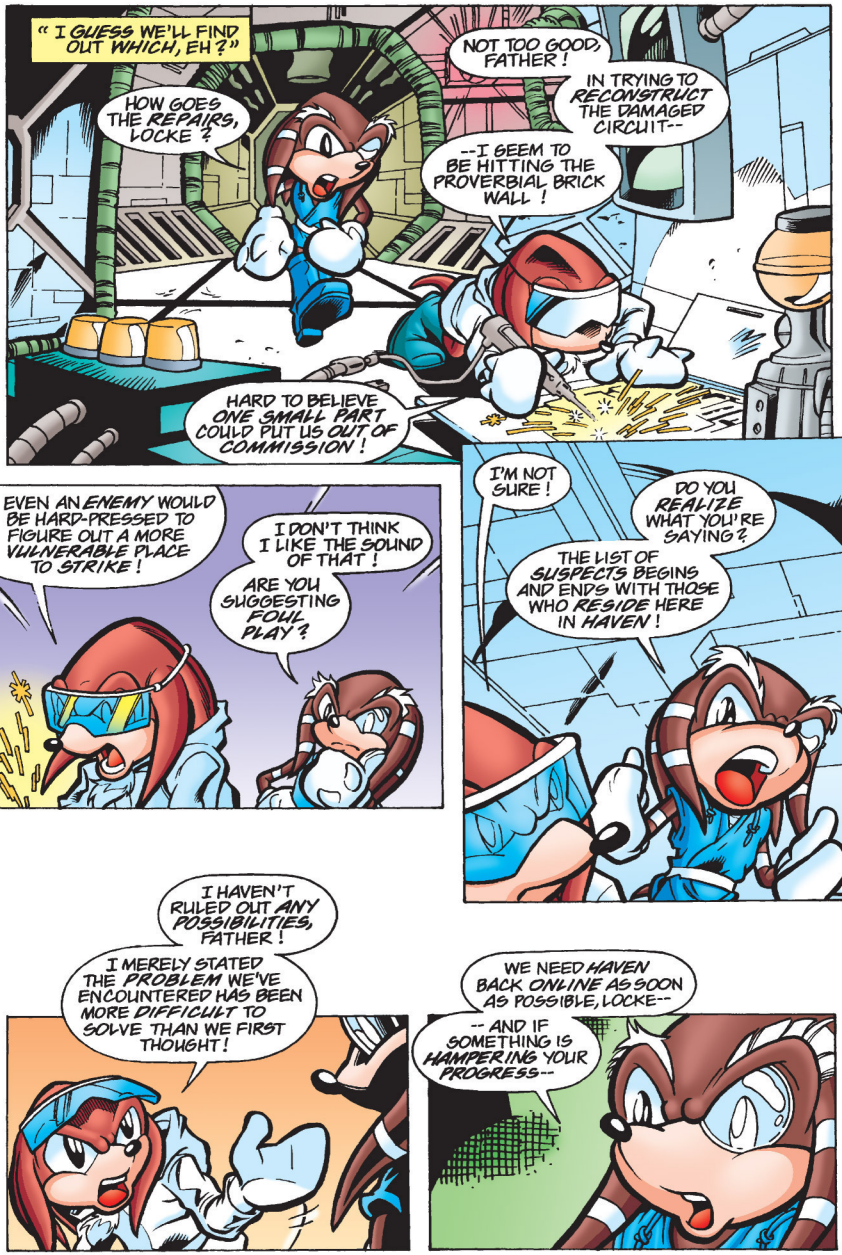
SENSING AN INSIDIOUS DARK LEGION PLOT BEHIND THIS, KNUCKLES HAS VENTURED FORTH TO THE JAIL CELLS OF THE **ECHIDNA SECURITY AGENCY**, WHERE THE ONE ECHIDNA WHO MAY HAVE THE ANSWERS IS CURRENTLY INCARCERATED, WHILE HIS GRANDFATHER TOBOR IS LEFT IN THE CARE OF **LARA-LE** AND JULIE-SU...


SOME MORE TEA, GRANDFATHER TOBOR ?
YES, THANK YOU, LARA-LE!
IT HAS BEEN SO LONG SINCE I'VE EXPERIENCED THE WARMTH OF HOME AND FAMILY!
WOULD YOU MIND IF I MADE AN INQUIRY OF A PERSONAL NATURE, SIR ?
ASK ME ANYTHING, CHILD.
WHICH MATTERED MORE TO YOU--
--BEING A GUARDIAN--
--OR BEING A HUSBAND AND FATHER ?
YOU KNOW-- THAT'S THE ONE THING I NEVER GAVE MUCH THOUGHT TO!
I TOOK IT AS A GIVEN THAT ONE DAY I'D BE A GUARDIAN--
--JUST AS I ASSUMED HAVING A WIFE AND CHILD WAS THE NORMAL ORDER OF THINGS!
WHAT I NEVER REALIZED--

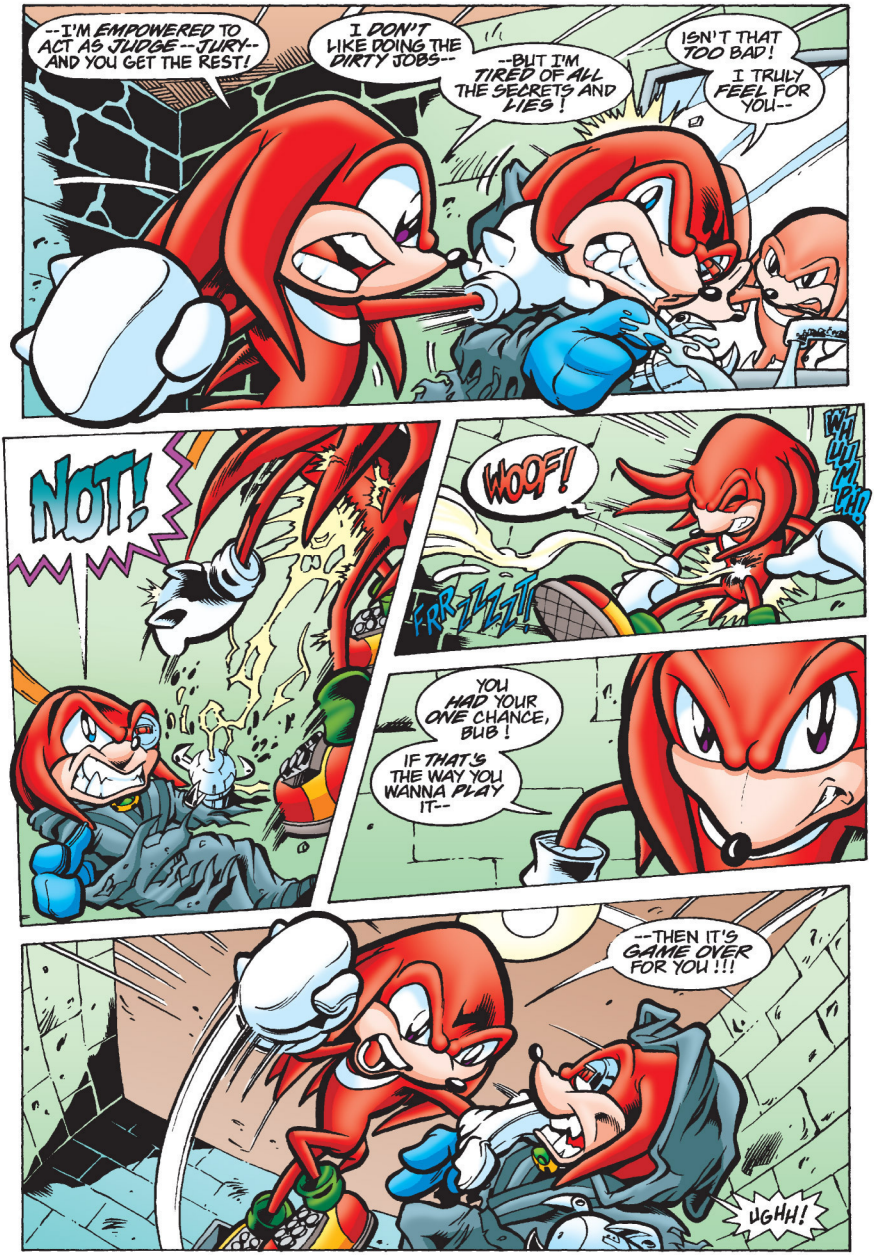

"--WERE THE DEMANDS AND SACRIFICES ONE WOULD IMPOSE ON THE OTHER!"
WE NEED TO TALK!
WEllllllll...
ABOUT TIME YOU SHOWED!
I WAS WONDERING HOW LONG IT WOULD TAKE BEFORE YOU DECIDED TO GRACE ME WITH YOUR PRESENCE!
HOWEVER, IF YOU WISH TO CONVERSE, IT'S YOU AND ME, ONE-ON-ONE ONLY!
YOU HEARD HIM, CONSTABLE!
LOCK US UP!
DEBT OF HONOR

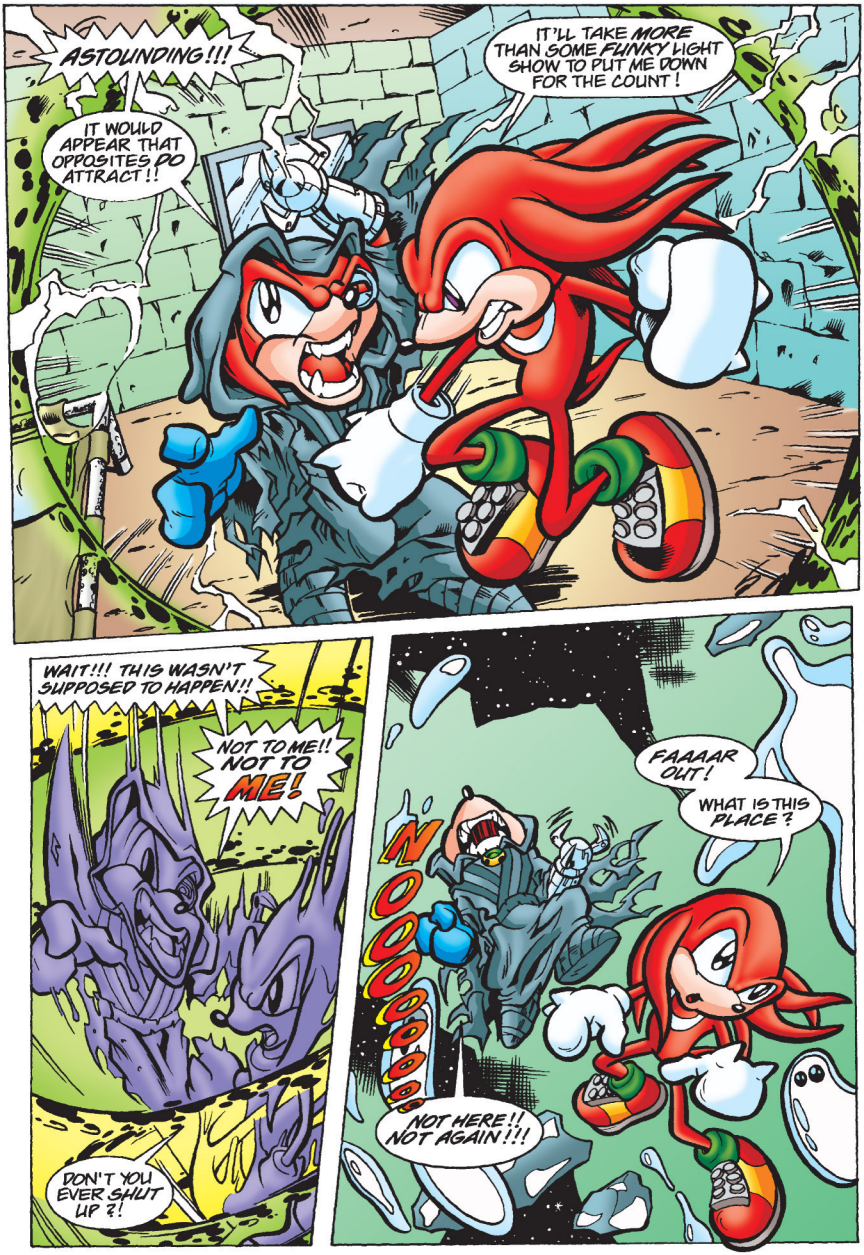

BE REASONABLE, GUARDIAN!
I CAN'T JUST LOCK YOU INSIDE WITH A DANGEROUS CRIMINAL!
WHY NOT?
I PROMISE NOT TO HURT HIM!
I FAIL TO SEE THE HUMOR!
I BET OUR FRIEND HERE GOT THE JOKE!
YOU DO NOT SCARE ME, KNUCKLES!
NOR DO ANY OF YOUR KIND!
A BIT FIESTY, AREN'T WE?
PLEASE, GUARDIAN! I BEG YOU TO RECONSIDER!
NAH!
IF I CAN'T HANDLE KRAGOK--
--I MIGHT AS WELL HANG IT UP!
C'MON! WE'RE WASTING TIME!
KLANG!
IF HE TRIES ANYTHING, MY MEN AND I WILL BE RIGHT OUTSIDE THIS DOOR!
NO!
NO?!

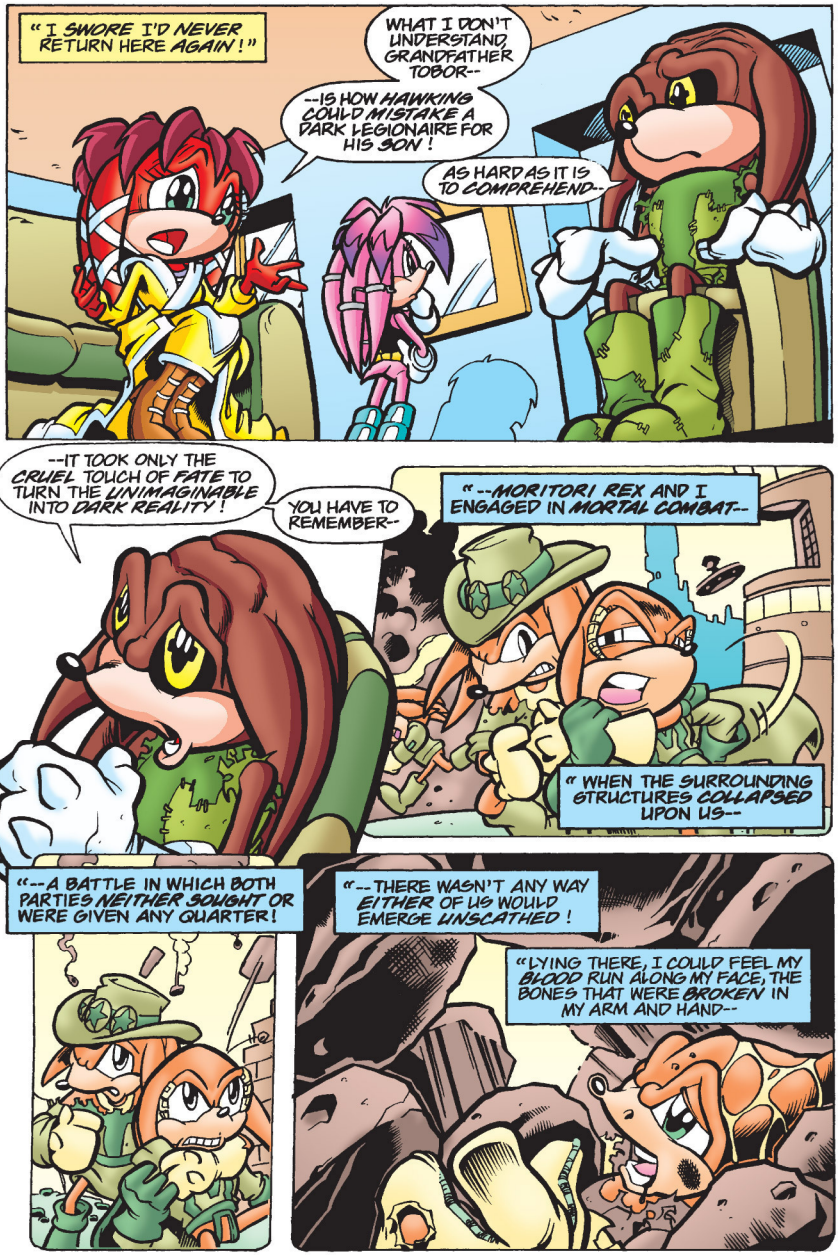

I WANT COMPLETE PRIVACY!
I DON'T WANT EITHER YOU OR YOUR MEN ANYWHERE WITHIN SHOUTING DISTANCE!
UNDERSTOOD!
TCHINK!
THEY'RE GONE!
IT'S JUST YOU AND ME NOW!
I'VE GOT TO HAND IT TO YOU, KNUCKLES!
VERY FEW WOULD EVEN CONSIDER GOING ONE-ON-ONE AGAINST ME!
EITHER YOU'VE GOT THE BIGGEST PAIR OF KNUCKLES I'VE EVER SEEN--
--OR ELSE YOU'RE A COMPLETE FOOL!
WHICH IS IT?

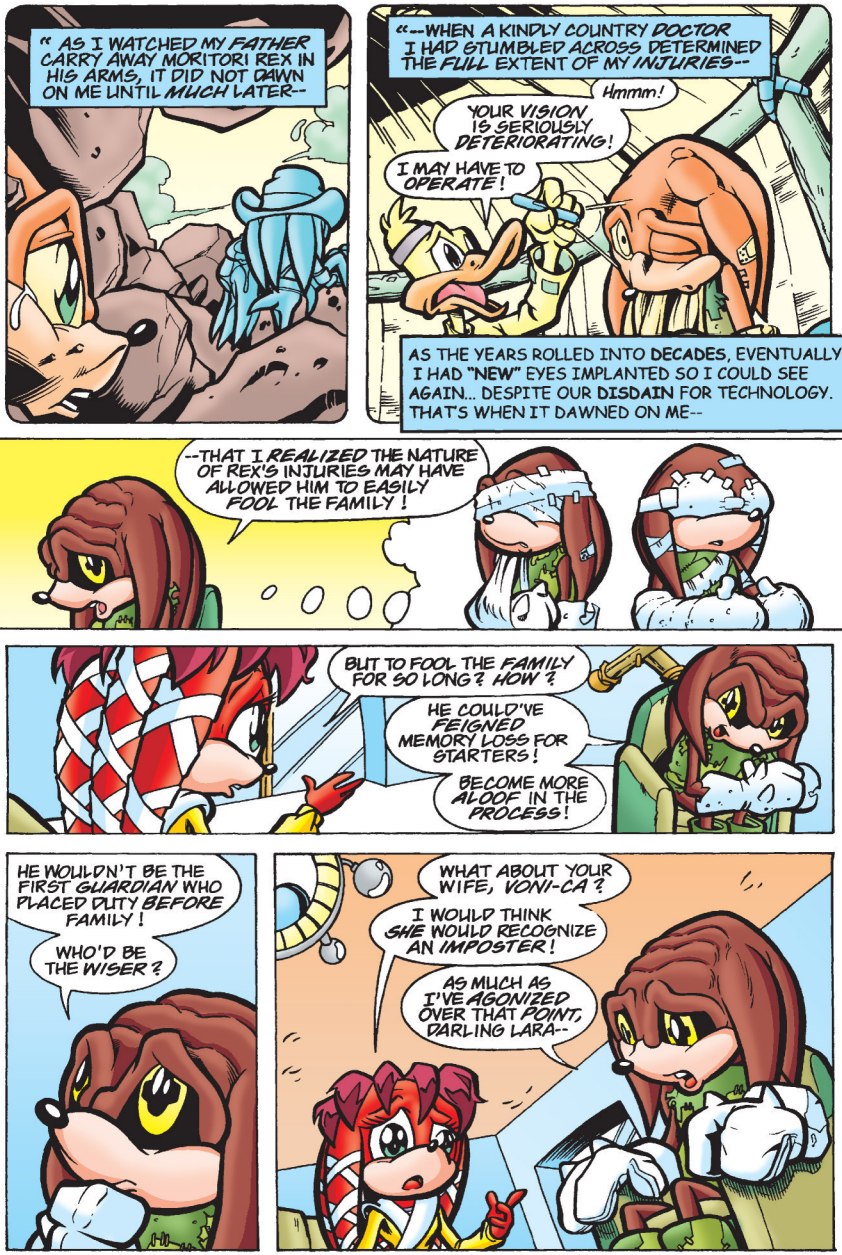

" I GUESS WE'LL FIND OUT WHICH, EH?"
HOW GOES THE REPAIRS, LOCKE?
NOT TOO GOOD, FATHER!
IN TRYING TO RECONSTRUCT THE DAMAGED CIRCUIT--
--I SEEM TO BE HITTING THE PROVERBIAL BRICK WALL!
HARD TO BELIEVE ONE SMALL PART COULD PUT US OUT OF COMMISSION!
EVEN AN ENEMY WOULD BE HARD-PRESSED TO FIGURE OUT A MORE VULNERABLE PLACE TO STRIKE!
I DON'T THINK I LIKE THE SOUND OF THAT!
ARE YOU SUGGESTING FOUL PLAY?
I'M NOT SURE!
DO YOU REALIZE WHAT YOU'RE SAYING?
THE LIST OF SUSPECTS BEGINS AND ENDS WITH THOSE WHO RESIDE HERE IN HAVEN!
I HAVEN'T RULED OUT ANY POSSIBILITIES, FATHER!
I MERELY STATED THE PROBLEM WE'VE ENCOUNTERED HAS BEEN MORE DIFFICULT TO SOLVE THAN WE FIRST THOUGHT!
WE NEED HAVEN BACK ONLINE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, LOCKE--
-- AND IF SOMETHING IS HAMPERING YOUR PROGRESS--

"--WE NEED TO DISCOVER THE SOURCE AND TAKE CARE OF IT!"
WHY DON'T WE GET RIGHT DOWN TO THE NITTY-GRITTY--
--BY HAVING YOU TELL ME WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT SOMEONE NAMED TOBOR!
WHAT MAKES YOU THINK I KNOW?
AS A LEADER OF THE DARK LEGION, I KNOW YOU HAD ACCESS TO ALL THEIR SECRETS!
SECRETS NOT EVERYONE WAS LET IN ON!
MAYBE OTHERS DIDN'T KNOW TOBOR--
--BUT I'M BETTING YOU DO!
EVEN IF I DID KNOW, WHY SHOULD I TELL YOU?
WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?
CONSTABLE REMINGTON MAY BE BOUND BY THE LETTER OF THE LAW--
--BUT I'M NOT!
AS A GUARDIAN--


--I'M EMPOWERED TO ACT AS JUDGE--JURY--AND YOU GET THE REST!
I DON'T LIKE DOING THE DIRTY JOBS--
--BUT I'M TIRED OF ALL THE SECRETS AND LIES!
ISN'T THAT TOO BAD!
I TRULY FEEL FOR YOU--
NOT!
WOOF!
WHUMP!!!
FRRZZZT
YOU HAD YOUR ONE CHANCE, BUB!
IF THAT'S THE WAY YOU WANNA PLAY IT--
--THEN IT'S GAME OVER FOR YOU!!!
UGHH!

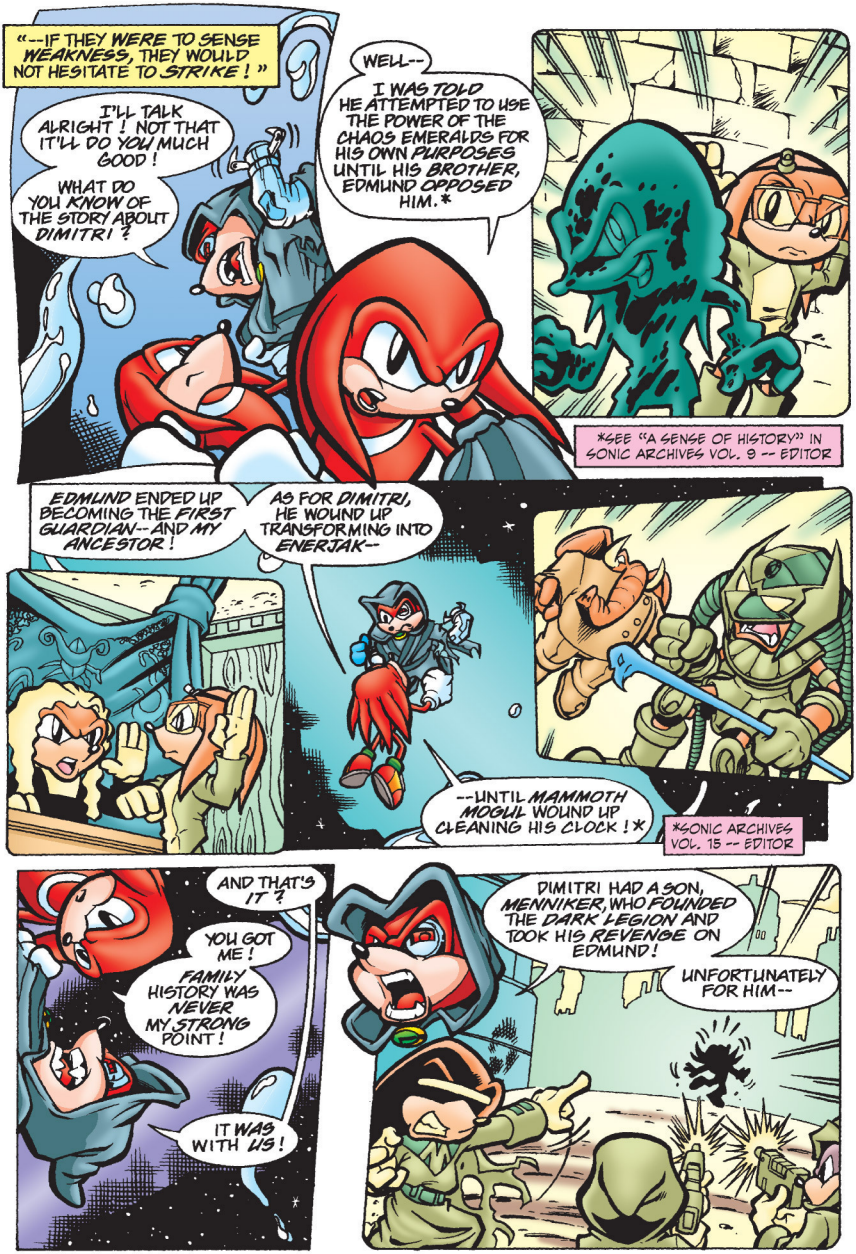

ASTOUNDING!!!
IT WOULD APPEAR THAT OPPOSITES DO ATTRACT!!
IT'LL TAKE MORE THAN SOME FUNKY LIGHT SHOW TO PUT ME DOWN FOR THE COUNT!
WAIT!!! THIS WASN'T SUPPOSED TO HAPPEN!!
NOT TO ME!! NOT TO ME!
DON'T YOU EVER SHUT UP?!
NOOOOOOO!!!
FAAAAR OUT!
WHAT IS THIS PLACE?
NOT HERE!! NOT AGAIN!!!

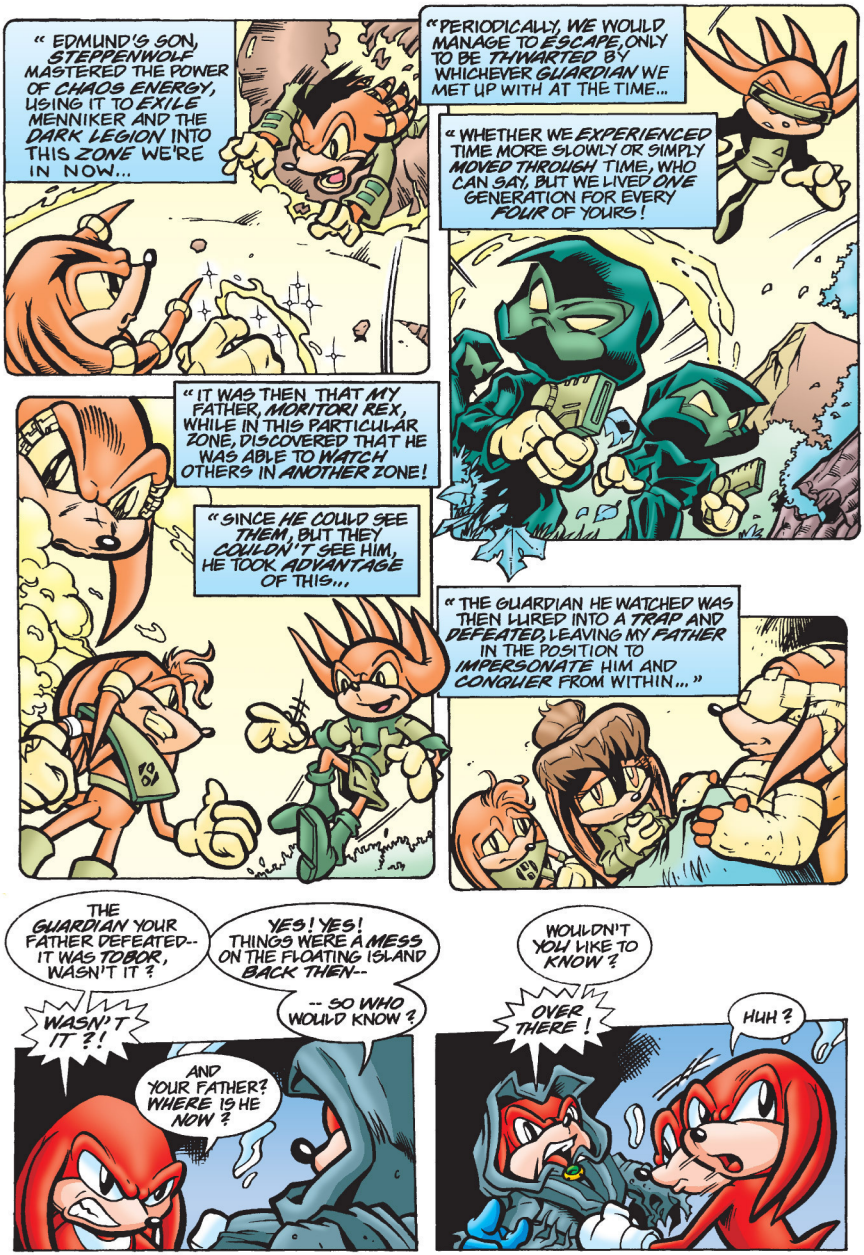

"I SWORE I'D NEVER RETURN HERE AGAIN!"
WHAT I DON'T UNDERSTAND, GRANDFATHER TOBOR--
--IS HOW HAWKING COULD MISTAKE A DARK LEGIONAIRE FOR HIS SON!
AS HARD AS IT IS TO COMPREHEND--
--IT TOOK ONLY THE CRUEL TOUCH OF FATE TO TURN THE UNIMAGINABLE INTO DARK REALITY!
YOU HAVE TO REMEMBER--
"--MORITORI REX AND I ENGAGED IN MORTAL COMBAT--
"WHEN THE SURROUNDING STRUCTURES COLLAPSED UPON US--
"--A BATTLE IN WHICH BOTH PARTIES NEITHER SOUGHT OR WERE GIVEN ANY QUARTER!
"--THERE WASN'T ANY WAY EITHER OF US WOULD EMERGE UNSCATHED!
"LYING THERE, I COULD FEEL MY BLOOD RUN ALONG MY FACE, THE BONES THAT WERE BROKEN IN MY ARM AND HAND--

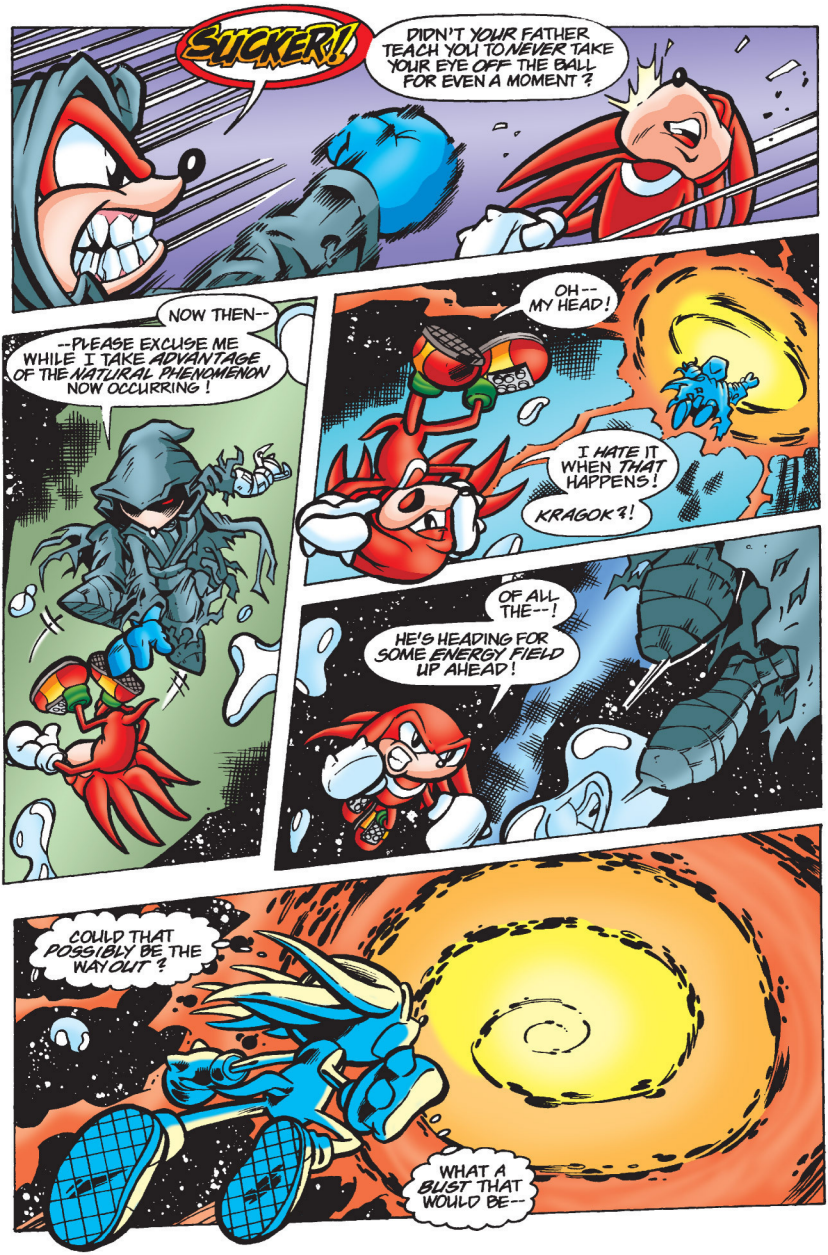

" AS I WATCHED MY FATHER CARRY AWAY MORITORI REX IN HIS ARMS, IT DID NOT DAWN ON ME UNTIL MUCH LATER--
"--WHEN A KINDLY COUNTRY DOCTOR I HAD STUMBLED ACROSS DETERMINED THE FULL EXTENT OF MY INJURIES--
Hmmm!
YOUR VISION IS SERIOUSLY DETERIORATING!
I MAY HAVE TO OPERATE!
AS THE YEARS ROLLED INTO DECADES, EVENTUALLY I HAD "NEW" EYES IMPLANTED SO I COULD SEE AGAIN... DESPITE OUR DISDAIN FOR TECHNOLOGY. THAT'S WHEN IT DAWNED ON ME--
--THAT I REALIZED THE NATURE OF REX'S INJURIES MAY HAVE ALLOWED HIM TO EASILY FOOL THE FAMILY!
BUT TO FOOL THE FAMILY FOR SO LONG? HOW?
HE COULD'VE FEIGNED MEMORY LOSS FOR STARTERS!
BECOME MORE ALOOF IN THE PROCESS!
HE WOULDN'T BE THE FIRST GUARDIAN WHO PLACED DUTY BEFORE FAMILY!
WHO'D BE THE WISER?
WHAT ABOUT YOUR WIFE, VONI-CA?
I WOULD THINK SHE WOULD RECOGNIZE AN IMPOSTER!
AS MUCH AS I'VE AGONIZED OVER THAT POINT, DARLING LARA--

"--THAT'S THE ONE PIECE OF THE PUZZLE I CAN'T FIGURE OUT!"
ALRIGHT, KRAGOK--
WHERE EXACTLY ARE WE?
AND WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT TOBOR?
YOUR KIND NEVER DID US ANY FAVORS--
--SO WHY SHOULDN'T I RESPOND IN KIND?
BECAUSE IT AIN'T GOING TO DO YOU A LICK OF GOOD GETTING ME ALL MEAN AND RILED UP--
--THAT'S WHY!!!
I'M THROUGH PLAYING GAMES, KRAGOK!
YOU'RE GOING TO TELL ME--
--ALL ABOUT TOBOR--

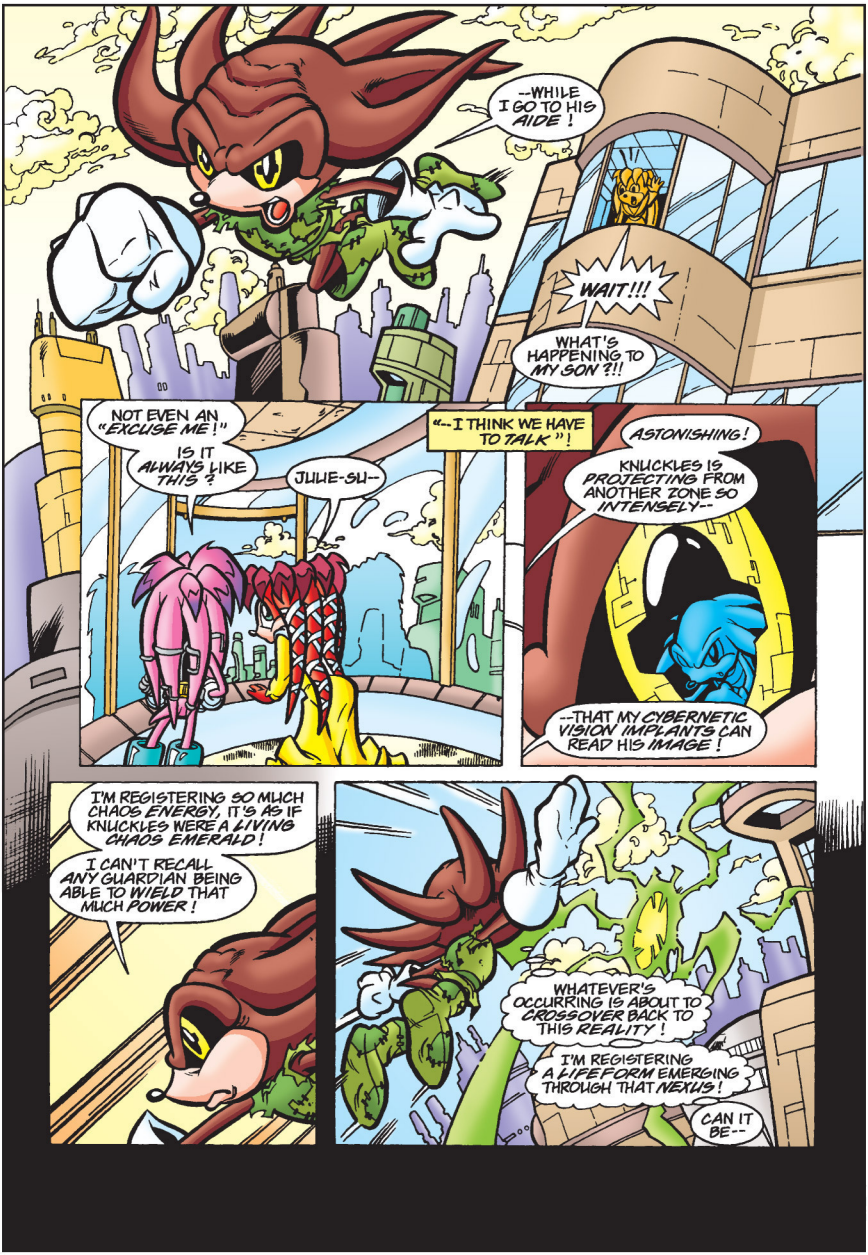
"--AND WHAT THE REAL DEAL IS!"
DON'T YOU FIND IT A LITTLE TOO CONVENIENT THAT ONE COMPONENT TAKES OUT AN ENTIRE COMPLEX?
IT'S NOT SURPRISING AT ALL TO ME, SABRE!
I'VE STUDIED THE LAYOUT FOR HAVEN THOROUGHLY--
--AND ITS EFFICIENCY IS DERIVED FROM ITS VERY SIMPLICITY!
WHAT I FIND TROUBLING--
--IS OUR VULNERABILITY TO ENEMY ATTACK AT THE MOMENT!
FORTUNATELY, GRANDFATHER SOJOURNER, THE SANCTITY OF HAVEN HAS YET TO BE VIOLATED!
THERE IS STILL THE DARK LEGION TO RECKON WITH!
THEY SHOULD NOT BE TAKEN LIGHTLY!
THEY ARE AT A LOW POINT AT THIS MOMENT THEMSELVES, GRANDFATHER SPECTRE, BUT--
--I'LL CONCEDE YOU THIS, THOUGH--


"--IF THEY WERE TO SENSE WEAKNESS, THEY WOULD NOT HESITATE TO STRIKE!"
I'LL TALK ALRIGHT! NOT THAT IT'LL DO YOU MUCH GOOD!
WHAT DO YOU KNOW OF THE STORY ABOUT DIMITRI?
WELL--
I WAS TOLD HE ATTEMPTED TO USE THE POWER OF THE CHAOS EMERALDS FOR HIS OWN PURPOSES UNTIL HIS BROTHER, EDMUND OPPOSED HIM.*
*SEE "A SENSE OF HISTORY" IN SONIC ARCHIVES VOL. 9 -- EDITOR
EDMUND ENDED UP BECOMING THE FIRST GUARDIAN--AND MY ANCESTOR!
AS FOR DIMITRI, HE WOUND UP TRANSFORMING INTO ENERJAK--
--UNTIL MAMMOTH MOGUL WOUND UP CLEANING HIS CLOCK!*
*SONIC ARCHIVES VOL. 15 -- EDITOR
AND THAT'S IT?
YOU GOT ME! FAMILY HISTORY WAS NEVER MY STRONG POINT!
IT WAS WITH US!
DIMITRI HAD A SON, MENNIKER, WHO FOUNDED THE DARK LEGION AND TOOK HIS REVENGE ON EDMUND!
UNFORTUNATELY FOR HIM--

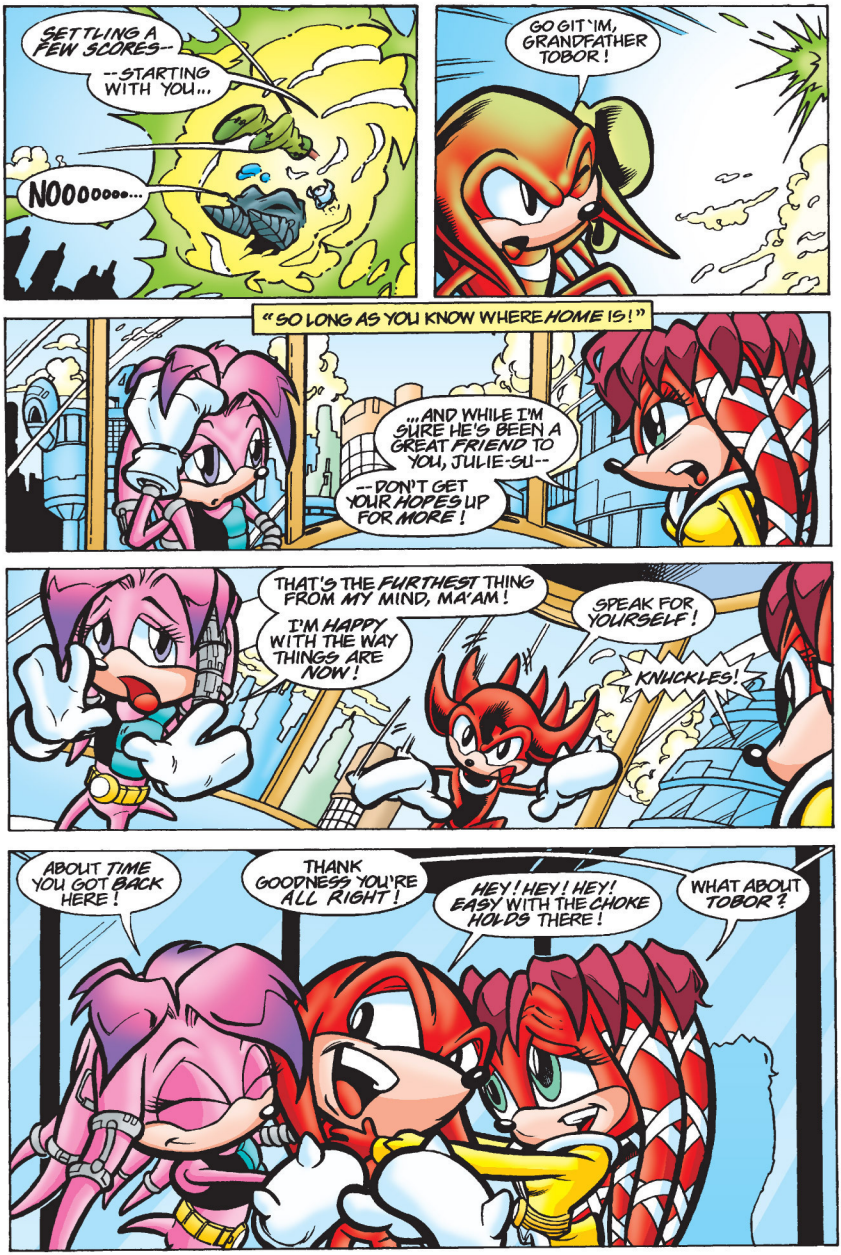

"EDMUND'S SON, STEPPENWOLF MASTERED THE POWER OF CHAOS ENERGY, USING IT TO EXILE MENNIKER AND THE DARK LEGION INTO THIS ZONE WE'RE IN NOW...
"PERIODICALLY, WE WOULD MANAGE TO ESCAPE, ONLY TO BE THWARTED BY WHICHEVER GUARDIAN WE MET UP WITH AT THE TIME...
"WHETHER WE EXPERIENCED TIME MORE SLOWLY OR SIMPLY MOVED THROUGH TIME, WHO CAN SAY, BUT WE LIVED ONE GENERATION FOR EVERY FOUR OF YOURS!
"IT WAS THEN THAT MY FATHER, MORITORI REX, WHILE IN THIS PARTICULAR ZONE, DISCOVERED THAT HE WAS ABLE TO WATCH OTHERS IN ANOTHER ZONE!
"SINCE HE COULD SEE THEM, BUT THEY COULDN'T SEE HIM, HE TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THIS...
"THE GUARDIAN HE WATCHED WAS THEN LURED INTO A TRAP AND DEFEATED, LEAVING MY FATHER IN THE POSITION TO IMPERSONATE HIM AND CONQUER FROM WITHIN..."
THE GUARDIAN YOUR FATHER DEFEATED-- IT WAS TOBOR, WASN'T IT?
YES! YES! THINGS WERE A MESS ON THE FLOATING ISLAND BACK THEN--
-- SO WHO WOULD KNOW?
WASN'T IT?!
AND YOUR FATHER? WHERE IS HE NOW?
WOULDN'T YOU LIKE TO KNOW?
OVER THERE!
HUH?

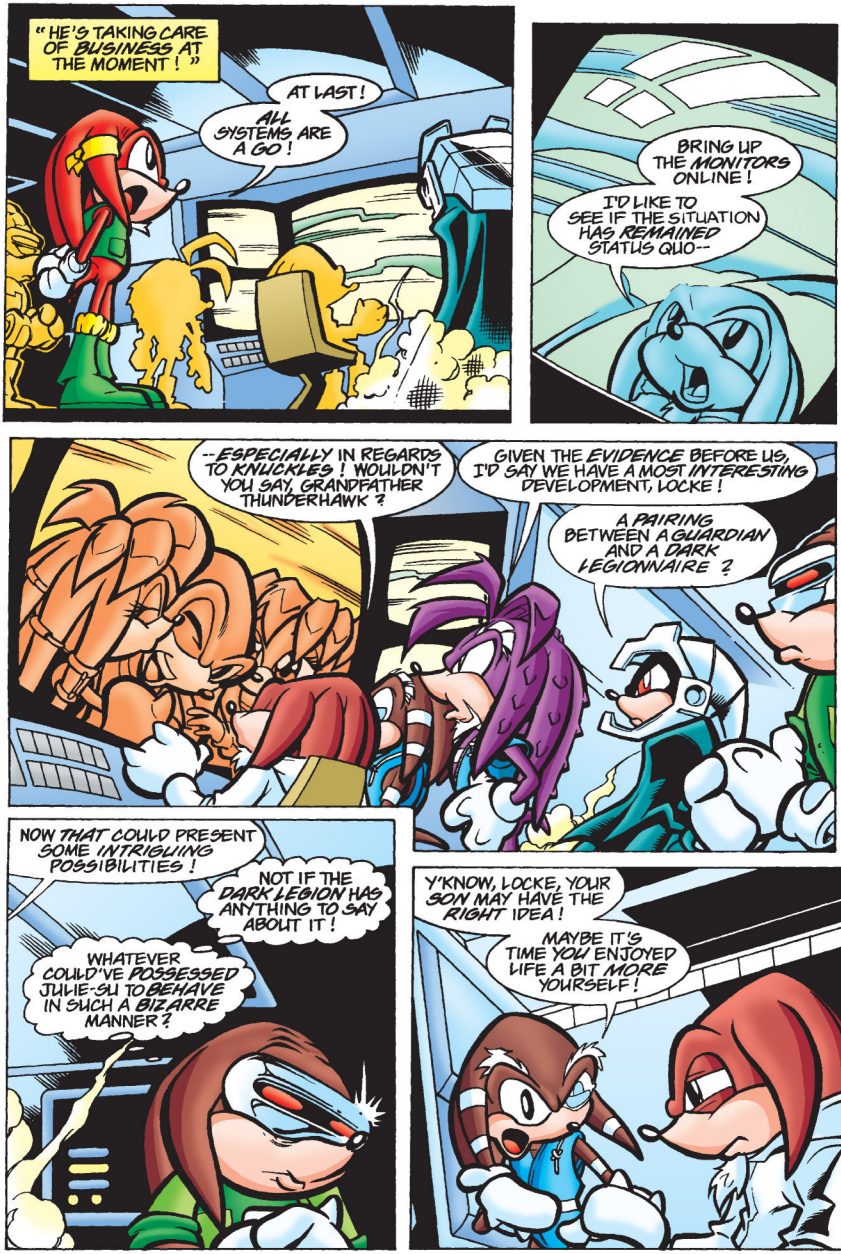

SUCKER!
DIDN'T YOUR FATHER TEACH YOU TO NEVER TAKE YOUR EYE OFF THE BALL FOR EVEN A MOMENT?
OH-- MY HEAD!
I HATE IT WHEN THAT HAPPENS!
KRAGOK?!
NOW THEN--
--PLEASE EXCUSE ME WHILE I TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE NATURAL PHENOMENON NOW OCCURRING!
OF ALL THE--!
HE'S HEADING FOR SOME ENERGY FIELD UP AHEAD!
COULD THAT POSSIBLY BE THE WAY OUT?
WHAT A BUST THAT WOULD BE--

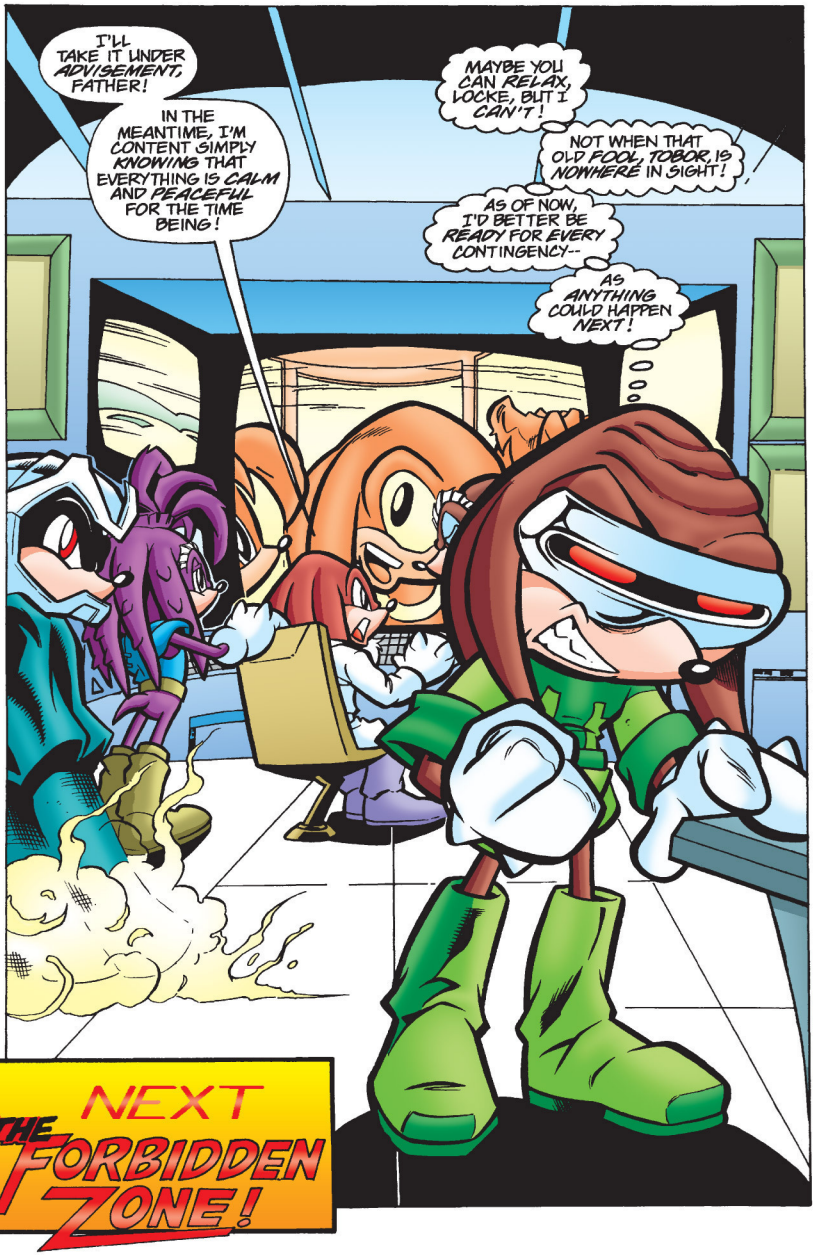
"--IF HE GOT THROUGH AND I DIDN'T!"
THIS IS INCREDIBLE!
I'VE BEEN LOOKING THROUGH THE FAMILY ALBUMS--
--AND THERE'S NOT A TRACE OF EITHER YOU OR VONI-CA ANYWHERE!
THAT'S TO BE EXPECTED!
THE ENEMY WOULD HAVE BEEN MOST THOROUGH!
IN FACT, I'D--
KNUCKLES!
HE'S IN TROUBLE!
WHERE?
HOW DO YOU KNOW?
I JUST DO! TAKE MY WORD FOR IT!
NOW STEP ASIDE--


--WHILE I GO TO HIS AIDE !
WAIT !!!
WHAT'S HAPPENING TO MY SON ?!!
NOT EVEN AN "EXCUSE ME !"
IS IT ALWAYS LIKE THIS ?
JULIE-SU--
"--I THINK WE HAVE TO TALK" !
ASTONISHING !
KNUCKLES IS PROTECTING FROM ANOTHER ZONE SO INTENSELY--
--THAT MY CYBERNETIC VISION IMPLANTS CAN READ HIS IMAGE !
I'M REGISTERING SO MUCH CHAOS ENERGY, IT'S AS IF KNUCKLES WERE A LIVING CHAOS EMERALD !
I CAN'T RECALL ANY GUARDIAN BEING ABLE TO WIELD THAT MUCH POWER !
WHATEVER'S OCCURRING IS ABOUT TO CROSSOVER BACK TO THIS REALITY !
I'M REGISTERING A LIFEFORM EMERGING THROUGH THAT NEXUS !
CAN IT BE--

--A DARK LEGIONNAIRE?!
SWEET IRONY!
OF ALL THE ECHIDNAS TO RUN INTO!!
I WOULDN'T BE SO SMUG, VILLAIN!
I'LL MAKE YOU WISH YOU STAYED UNDER THE ROCK YOU CRAWLED OUT FROM!
UNGH!
OUT OF MY WAY, OLD MAN!!!!
YOU CAN JOIN YOUR BRAT DESCENDENT IN THE TWILIGHT CAGE AFTER I'M LONG GONE!
LET'S NOT BE SO HASTY, KRAGOK!
I'M FAR FROM THROUGH WITH YOU!
NO, SON!! GET OUT OF HERE!
THIS IS MY FIGHT!
ARE YOU INSANE, OLD MAN?!!
WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?!!


SETTLING A FEW SCORES--
--STARTING WITH YOU...
NOOOoooo...
GO GIT 'IM, GRANDFATHER TOBOR!
"SO LONG AS YOU KNOW WHERE HOME IS!"
...AND WHILE I'M SURE HE'S BEEN A GREAT FRIEND TO YOU, JULIE-SU--
--DON'T GET YOUR HOPES UP FOR MORE!
THAT'S THE FURTHEST THING FROM MY MIND, MA'AM!
I'M HAPPY WITH THE WAY THINGS ARE NOW!
SPEAK FOR YOURSELF!
KNUCKLES!
ABOUT TIME YOU GOT BACK HERE!
THANK GOODNESS YOU'RE ALL RIGHT!
HEY! HEY! HEY! EASY WITH THE CHOKE HOLDS THERE!
WHAT ABOUT TOBOR?


"HE'S TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS AT THE MOMENT!"
AT LAST!
ALL SYSTEMS ARE A GO!
BRING UP THE MONITORS ONLINE!
I'D LIKE TO SEE IF THE SITUATION HAS REMAINED STATUS QUO--
--ESPECIALLY IN REGARDS TO KNUCKLES! WOULDN'T YOU SAY, GRANDFATHER THUNDERHAWK?
GIVEN THE EVIDENCE BEFORE US, I'D SAY WE HAVE A MOST INTERESTING DEVELOPMENT, LOCKE!
A PAIRING BETWEEN A GUARDIAN AND A DARK LEGIONNAIRE?
NOW THAT COULD PRESENT SOME INTRIGUING POSSIBILITIES!
NOT IF THE DARK LEGION HAS ANYTHING TO SAY ABOUT IT!
WHATEVER COULD'VE POSSESSED JULIE-SU TO BEHAVE IN SUCH A BIZARRE MANNER?
Y'KNOW, LOCKE, YOUR SON MAY HAVE THE RIGHT IDEA!
MAYBE IT'S TIME YOU ENJOYED LIFE A BIT MORE YOURSELF!


I'LL TAKE IT UNDER ADVISEMENT, FATHER!
IN THE MEANTIME, I'M CONTENT SIMPLY KNOWING THAT EVERYTHING IS CALM AND PEACEFUL FOR THE TIME BEING!
MAYBE YOU CAN RELAX, LOCKE, BUT I CAN'T!
NOT WHEN THAT OLD FOOL, TOBOR, IS NOWHERE IN SIGHT!
AS OF NOW, I'D BETTER BE READY FOR EVERY CONTINGENCY--
AS ANYTHING COULD HAPPEN NEXT!
NEXT
THE FORBIDDEN ZONE!